



REPLY TO THE THRONE SPEECH

2013

*Delivered by Hon. Marc Bean, JP, MP
Leader of the Opposition
February 15, 2013*

PLP

PROGRESSIVE LABOUR PARTY

Mr. Speaker,

The result of the December 17th election which saw the One Bermuda Alliance elevated to the Government benches is one which we respect, accept, and understand. We congratulate the new government and wish them well in leading our country over the next five years.

Mr. Speaker

The people have spoken, and in response to **their** will, there has been a shift within the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party.

This shift does not represent the repudiation of our past, our philosophy, or the men and women who over the past 50 years have sacrificed to give our people a voice. Instead, this shift within the Progressive Labour Party represents the melding of our long standing commitment to social and economic justice with a new mindset and a new approach towards expanding opportunity.

The Progressive Labour Party will pursue a BALANCED approach, eschewing the radicalism of far left policies or the extremist policies of the right wing. Neither the nanny state, nor a state where profits take precedence over people is desirable, and we shall pursue and promote policies that expand opportunity for all, and renew our society's commitment to fairness and justice.

In the words of His Imperial Majesty Haile Sellassie I, ***“What we seek is a new and a different way of life. We search for a way of life in which all men will be treated as responsible human beings, able to participate fully in the political affairs of their government; a way of life in which ignorance and poverty, if not abolished, are at least the exception and are actively combated...”***

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP believes that unemployment is the greatest crisis facing our country and that Bermudians must be put to work swiftly. To get Bermudians working again we propose:

- Full implementation of our Infrastructure Strategy Plan, identifying improvements or repairs to our infrastructure that will not only enhance our overall quality of life, but create business opportunities for construction companies and jobs for Bermudian construction workers.

- The development of a Blue Economy, inclusive of Sea-Bed mining, Aquaculture, and Off-Shore Fishing. This will lead to the creation of new job opportunities, the diversification of our economy, and the creation of new revenue streams. The Blue Economy concept was brought to my attention by former Premier Hon. Dr. David Saul as a tremendous untapped resource for Bermuda that could assist greatly in not only creating new jobs and opportunities but also as a means of substantially reducing our debt.
- Creation of a Sea-Side Facility for Offshore Fishing
- Passage of The Incentives for Job Makers Act, creating a clear and direct set of benefits for new businesses to establish in Bermuda, bringing with them new jobs and new opportunities
- Designation of a segment of Bermuda Land Development Corporation land as an “Economic FREE Zone.” Targeting specific types of businesses such as asset management companies with incentives such as payroll and other tax exemptions.
- Payroll tax exemptions for the retail, hospitality and restaurant sectors be extended, providing an incentive to keep Bermudians employed.
- Full implementation of The One Stop Career Centre and The Career Pathways Programme as key components to getting our people working again.

Mr. Speaker,

We are pleased that the government appears to share our commitment to better aligning education: technical and academic, to the real world economy. One of the major vehicles that the PLP intended to utilize to achieve what the Throne Speech referred to as “lifelong learning in Bermuda”, was the Job Corps Programme which was to be situated in a campus environment at the former Harmony Hall site in Paget. While this program was conspicuously absent from the Throne Speech, we hope that the government will quickly move forward with this exciting initiative, designed to get our young people into the economic mainstream.

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP believes in a workforce development model that does not nostalgically seek to re-establish an outdated model from the 1970’s and 80’s; but rather one that is reflective of Bermuda today and the Bermuda economy of tomorrow.

This must be a model that acknowledges that technical education in the 21st Century requires of its students the same commitment to academic rigor as it would if one were studying to be an accountant or lawyer.

Mr. Speaker,

For Bermuda to maintain its competitiveness in the hyper-competitive global economy we must have a workforce that is educated at a higher level than the OECD median of academic abilities in literacy, math and science. Nothing illustrates this more than the fact that a Toyota Prius mechanic must possess at least a grade 16 level in terms of literacy and numeracy in order to comprehend and utilize the car's repair manual.

Technical education will continue to be transformed over the next decade as more processes and skills are computerized and/or performed by computers, sensors and robots. Information technology, even as we speak, is becoming the norm and not the exception in so many products and systems: appliances and gadgets of all sorts, relaying real time information on their operations to users and operators.

Mr. Speaker,

The ability to work in fields that utilize this technology will require the ability to design, use and programme these systems. These skill sets can only be obtained by the acquisition of a strong and rigorous academic background. No longer should an academic education be considered surplus to the needs of Bermudians in the work place.

Mr. Speaker, we also must highlight, that the CISCO Academy, which was also implemented by the former Government and which is situated at the Bermuda College, must be actively and purposefully promoted to our young people as a vehicle to achieve the technical jobs of the future. The CISCO designation represents a global passport of opportunity, representing technical excellence for our young people.

Mr. Speaker

"The ultimate resource of a nation is its people. Unless this resource is employed for the benefit of the nation, unless the latent good which it represents is exploited to the maximum for the common good the nation will languish, poor in spirit, lacking in achievement"

In all things we must ensure that Bermudians come first in our country of birth. Our island's economic success will not be lasting or sustainable, if our people are reduced to mere spectators in our economy. All of us who are willing must have an opportunity to compete and participate in our economy.

Mr. Speaker,

The OBA has waxed eloquently and vociferously about their commitment to openness, transparency and accountability. They have demonstrated these ideals impeccably when it comes to providing comfort and job security to non- Bermudian work permit holders. Yet, when it comes to jobs for our people, they have been remarkably and shockingly lacking in details, specifics or solutions. In fact, the Government has given some sectors of our community the distinct impression that they are more interested in securing and increasing the number of foreign workers, than in creating jobs for the people already living here.

- The PLP encourages the government to take immediate action on enhancing the work permit framework and making changes to immigration laws to provide Bermudians with the assurance that they will not be treated like second class citizens in our country of birth.

Mr. Speaker,

"It is both the duty and responsibility of the world's fortunate few to help fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the unfortunate many..."

Many Bermudians, as a result of losing their jobs, now face losing their homes or being sent to prison for debt. While there will always be shiftless and irresponsible people unwilling to pay their way, today, many people are simply unable to make ends meet and their debts are rising. Our current system damages the family unit, makes criminals of the poor, and creates more harm than good. We call on Government to:

- Work with our local banking institutions on a solution to keep hard working Bermudians in their homes.
- Make legislative changes to allow new and more positive ways for debts to be resolved
- Improve regulation of the debt collection process.

We note with interest the Government's proposal to introduce mandatory parenting and budgeting classes to persons on financial assistance. At first glance this is a noble sentiment, but it evolves from a flawed premise. Not everyone on financial assistance is there because of personal irresponsibility, and not everyone on financial assistance can be tarred with the bad parent brush. Many Bermudians, for the first time in their lives have been forced to turn to the Government for help until they find a job. Until the recession struck, these Bermudians worked hard, paid their way, obeyed the law and took care of their responsibilities.

Were it not for the economic downturn, many of them would have never stepped foot into the office of Financial Assistance.

Bermudians are a proud people, and already, many who could legitimately benefit from the services provided by Financial Assistance are reluctant to come forward. We see no benefit in stigmatizing people on Financial Assistance, especially not in this economic climate.

Mr. Speaker,

While many people are happy to just have a job, there are others who dream of starting their own business and moving from being just consumers to being producers. Bermuda has traditionally provided a daunting economic environment for entrepreneurs, where often, it was easier to get a loan for a new boat than to obtain start-up capital for a new business. Together, we must identify ways to expand access to capital, in particular equity capital, encourage the greater use of small business by Government, and continue to identify mechanisms such as the EEZ to create a clear and attainable path to business ownership. The creation of direct links to the Caribbean and Latin America also presents a great opportunity for Bermudians to expand our entrepreneurial opportunities.

Mr. Speaker,

We must commit to examining our financial system and determine if the system that has been in place for centuries is still the right fit for our people. This must include a mature and frank discussion on Tax reform and Monetary policy, and Monetary reform.

We encourage the Government to push for more foreign investment and competition in Bermuda's marketplace, particularly in the areas of Banking and Legal Services. Deregulation in the Banking Sector could provide more jobs, lure international names, and promote more competition locally which would benefit consumers. Legal Services drive companies to jurisdictions. If Bermuda had local branches of international law firms, it would not only provide employment, but would also provide more people selling and marketing Bermuda to their clients around the world. If we are to build our business, we need more people selling Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker

"Education of the youth is the surest guarantee for a better life."

It forms the essential foundation for ensuring that future generations of Bermudians will be empowered to take possession of key roles in our society. Yet an education that only allows a man to acquire the skills to earn a job is insufficient for our needs. Education must also elevate the intellect and engender a conscientious passion for strengthening, improving, and making a meaningful contribution to our society.

Mr. Speaker,

For years we have fought to change the curriculum, making it more suitable for 21st century Bermuda. Now that we have established a world class curriculum equal to that taught in our island's private school system, we must change the culture in the education system itself. We must establish greater autonomy, greater accountability and greater levels of achievement. As a result of experience and humble reflection, and after 14 years of being Government, our approach towards education has shifted.

Mr. Speaker,

Going forward, it is the considered position of the PLP that we must:

- Dismantle the Middle School system, as it is an inherent part of the institutional culture that is damaging our social fabric. The mega school concept is a proven global failure and pretending that Bermuda has not been subjected to the same social and academic challenges as other jurisdictions is destructive. Studies have shown that between the ages of 10 and 14, young people begin to develop group consciousness. This is the same age our young people enter a middle-school environment, the location of which depends on the community where the young person resides. In our current format, gang culture has flourished. Studies conducted on schools in Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Baltimore where the middle school concept was eliminated each saw a decline in behavioral problems and a rise in academic achievement.
- Restore the education system to one with seven years of primary school, and five years of high school, as well as the de-centralization from the mega school concept. We further posit that the restoration of island wide competition in academics and athletics will create a stronger and more vibrant community for our young people. While we may give due consideration of the cost associated with such reform, we must also consider the cost and risk associated by not doing it. The consequences of a lack of political will, is grave indeed.

- Providing Principals with greater autonomy to run their schools and be assessed by the only meaningful result, student achievement.
- The creation of School Councils to strengthen and enhance parental and community involvement in our schools
- Supporting and expanding credible alternative educational options, such as home schools to meet the individual needs of students
- Lowering the school entrance age to 4 years old to enable our young people to get a head start on their schooling.
- Supporting the professional development of teachers and their licensing requirements with the creation of an education faculty at the Bermuda College
- Developing The Bermuda College into a four year University, and the introduction of programs that allows for the acquisition of professional designations relevant to filling the needs of our economy. The Bermuda Insurance Institute is an excellent example in this regard.

Mr. Speaker,

We note with interest government's desire to extend the school day. Have they discussed the implementation of this change with the Bermuda Union of Teachers? Will this require the alteration of the existing collective bargaining agreement? Will it require the hiring of more teachers? What impact will this have on existing, successful afterschool programs? We hope that these questions will be answered by the government in the near future.

Mr. Speaker,

Gun violence and gang conflict has touched many of our families and many of our communities. While the Bermuda Police Service has done a good job in capturing and attaining the conviction of many of the island's violent perpetrators, the fear that someone we love will be shot, or that a gun will be used to commit a crime against us or our families, is a tragic reality in 21st century Bermuda. To date, we have been hampered by a Government House that has not moved as swiftly as we would have liked, as sternly as we would have liked, and as efficiently as we would have liked, in stemming the tide of gang violence.

Mr. Speaker,

At this time it is important that we acknowledge the work of our Commissioner of Police Mr. Michael DeSilva. Under his leadership we have seen remarkable strides in the level of policing in Bermuda. The Commissioner and his team have performed admirably. Let us be reminded that the first duty of Government is to ensure law and order, and the protection of the people and their property from force, coercion, and fraud. As such,

The PLP proposes:

- The placing of operational control of the Bermuda Police Service in the hands of the duly elected Government of Bermuda. We believe that Bermudians are best suited to direct our war on crime
- The development of a National Crime Reduction Plan
- The introduction of a sustained police presence in areas known for drug trafficking, including sporting community fields and street corners
- Require inmates on work release to contribute a portion of their earnings to a Victim Compensation Fund.
- The creation of a sexual predator and pedophile registry.
- Expansion of the role of the Bermuda Regiment in marine interdiction

Judicial Reform should include:

- A full and frank discussion on the decriminalization of marijuana with a view towards holding a referendum on the subject.
- Tougher legislation for the collection of outstanding child support payments
- Establish a Small Claims Court
- The creation of a Mental Health Court
- Introduction of a Judicial Complaints Authority
- The Creation of Re-Entry Courts and Review Courts to ensure completion of mandated programmes and minimize recidivism respectively.
- Development of a strategy to contain the rising costs of Legal Aid

Mr. Speaker,

For all of their criticism of the PLP's handling of tourism, one would have expected that we would have heard a barrage of fresh ideas, new initiatives, and innovative programs. What we heard instead, was a cut and paste of what the PLP had already placed in the pipeline. Tourism is essential to Bermuda's economy and people. It requires all hands on deck, and it also requires us to think and do things differently. My mantra is "FREE UP", which is indicative of the requirement to be responsive to what the consumer wants, and not what we think they need.

To enhance Tourism and its product, we support the following initiatives and programs:

- The time has come for a referendum on gaming in Bermuda. The politicians, international investors, the business community, and the hospitality industry have all had their say and now it is time for the people of Bermuda to have their say and determine whether gaming is right for Bermuda.
- The Hotel Business Plan must be fully implanted and used to target and attract new hotel investment
- Funding that already exists within the Ministries entertainment budget should be used to hire an Entertainment Director to work with the Musician Union to revitalize entertainment in Bermuda.
- All future foreign contracts relating to tourism should be tied to a Bermudian entity to create opportunity and jobs for Bermudians.
- Succession planning and the opportunity to shadow existing non-Bermudian job holders must be established to ensure that our people play a more active role in the promotion of our island. We believe that educated, qualified Bermudians are best suited to market and promote our island to the world.
- The development of new markets, in particular, the Latin American and Caribbean markets

Mr. Speaker,

We have noticed that the municipalities were not mentioned much in the Throne Speech, yet the OBA stressed the municipalities during their election campaign whilst on the doorsteps. We encourage the Government to fulfill their promises to:

- Reopen the St. George's Golf Course
- Reopen the St. George's Police Station in a fully working capacity, inclusive of proper staffing
- Work closely with the Corporation of St George to protect its historical qualities, and further implement the Town Heritage Plan, and fulfill the pledge to commit sufficient funds to market St George as a World Heritage Site.
- Ensure a close working relationship with the Corporation of St George to ensure its viability as a municipality.
- Redevelop the St George waterfront and create a premier yachting destination.

The Corporation of Hamilton (CoH) was not mentioned at all in the Throne Speech; which begs the question; does the Government have plans for this municipality? The prosperity of the City of Hamilton should be a priority to the Government. Government should work closely with the Corporation of Hamilton to ensure its success

The Corporation of Hamilton currently has preliminary plans to develop the Hamilton Harbour waterfront. The Corporation of Hamilton should be assisted in their efforts to create alternative revenue streams whilst enhancing our tourism product.

Mr. Speaker,

We must come to terms with how we will be able to power our country in the future.

We support:

- Full implementation of the Energy White Paper
- Facilitating the introduction of natural gas into Bermuda to drive down electricity costs

In addition, we will give full support towards the implementation of our telecommunications reform that was initiated under the PLP. We are confident that such reform will greatly enhance our jurisdiction as a business hub, provide better products and services to the residents of Bermuda, and lower prices through competition. In fact Mr. Speaker, with these benefits and improvements, we will encourage the Government to move to permit the establishment of online-gaming businesses that can tap into a very lucrative global industry.

Mr. Speaker

"There is nothing as precious to man as a sound mind in a sound body and it is essential that the physical well being of our people merits as much attention as its spiritual welfare"

The PLP is committed to:

- Continue reforming our healthcare system to make it affordable and accessible to ALL Bermudians
- Encouraging the use of preventative and alternative medicine
- Introducing Home Health Care as a standard hospital benefit
- Consolidating public health insurance products like GEHI and HIP to enhance efficiency and improve administration
- Providing improved facilities to meet the needs of those currently being assisted at Orange Valley and the Opportunity Workshop
- Continuing to reduce the operating costs of the hospital

Mr. Speaker,

A clean, efficient and safe transportation system is essential to the success of Bermuda.

The PLP supports:

- Encouraging minibus owners to provide integrated shuttle services with public transportation
- Investigating the options for eco-friendly buses and government vehicles
- Redeveloping the L.F. Wade International Airport
- Working to expand airlift with a focus on Europe, The Caribbean, The GCC Region, The Azores and Latin America
- The acquisition of additional ferries into the fleet
- The development of a cruise ship port in the town of St. Georges in conjunction with major cruise lines

Mr. Speaker,

"The forests, the mountains, and the plains constitute wealth."

The need to balance protecting the environment with the economic and social development of our people is challenging, but necessary to preserve Bermuda for Bermudians yet unborn.

The PLP supports:

- The Introduction of a National Recycling Programme
- The implementation of the Sargasso Sea Initiative
- The Launch of National Tree Planting Campaign
- Creation of new, modernized policies on Dog ownership, breeding, licensing and training
- Development of A Feral Cat and Chicken Strategy
- Revision of the limit of the Permitted Development Application (One-Day Permit) to allow for larger or necessary structures to be included along with the ability of the Director of Planning to determine if a project outside this remit can be included.
- Improving the application form process and requiring more information to be documented up front, to allow for more consistent initial screening of applications in order to catch deficiencies early.
- Revising the Architect Act to enforce architectural standards, improve the quality of planning submissions, and reduce application processing time
- Allowing Applicants/Agents to make presentations to the DAB where the Planner and Agent disagree on the application
- Streamlining the Objection Process

Mr. Speaker

Community organizations have, over the years, by necessity filled the gaps in the system. To encourage their efforts and allow more of their funds to be spent on addressing the island's pressing social issues; we encourage the government to:

- Explore the creation of a National Lottery for the specific purpose of revitalizing our community clubs as safe, positive, thriving, parts of the communities in which they operate. In return for this support, community clubs would be required to abide by strict measures for compliance including the enforcement and reporting of illegal or anti-social behavior on their premises. If we want community clubs to be for the community, we cannot allow them to be a place where parents do not want to send their children.
- Allow community organizations and the parish councils to use vacant government properties or to assume responsibility for derelict government properties for nominal rents
- Move forward with our proposed private-public initiative that would have seen members of the business community assist in renovating at least 7 Workmans clubs with an investment of approximately \$30m. This would not only provide work for potentially hundreds of Bermudians, but would also revitalize and improve the condition of the participating clubs.

Mr. Speaker,

The government has announced that it is eliminating the land license requirement for the purchase of additional dwelling for married couples with a non-Bermudian spouse. It is important to note that restrictions on the acquisition of land by non-Bermudians has been a part of our legal framework for centuries and has long been accepted as necessary to protect the long term Bermudian interest in property.

Since the government has chosen to eliminate this restriction we look forward to seeing what measures they will establish to prevent the potential loss of land by illegal means such as 'fronting'.

Mr. Speaker

Our people are disinterested in politicians opposing their government just for the sake of scoring political brownie points. Our people are disinterested in game playing, manipulation and deceit. To that end, it is my firm commitment to fervently support the government in the steps they take to employ Bermudians, expand opportunities for Bermudians and elevate the conditions of Bermudians. Where our knowledge, experience and expertise can strengthen or improve government proposals we will gladly and freely offer that knowledge, experience and expertise. But in working with

the government, we shall also strive to ensure that Bermudians do not get left behind in a blind, unbridled and unrestrained pursuit of profit. In working with the government we shall also ensure that the issues facing our island's most vulnerable members; our seniors, our youth are not forgotten.

Mr. Speaker,

In reading the One Bermuda Alliance's Throne Speech there is much that we will be able to support and help move forward for the benefit of Bermudians. Ideas such as the Elimination of Conscription, the implementation of Operation Cease Fire, The formation of an Economic Development Committee, Expansion of the Career Pathways Programme, Repeal of the Park Hyatt Act 2008, Shared Parenting Legislation, Expansion of Early Childhood Screenings, Implementation of the Hopkins Report on Education and others are ideas that were born within the Progressive Labour Party, brought to the civil service, and crafted into proposed policy and legislative changes for the benefit of all Bermudians. These initiatives, properly executed, would provide a sound and balanced approach to addressing the challenges facing our people, and we will work with the OBA to make them a reality. While it would be tempting to characterize the Government's Throne Speech as a "Cut and Paste" document or as an example of political plagiarism, we prefer to believe that the greatest political victory does not occur at the polls, but in altering the hearts and minds of your political opponents for the better. To that end, we will not oppose for the sake of opposing, but instead offer meaningful, balanced and constructive solutions to strengthen these proposals.

Mr. Speaker

In presenting our Reply to the Throne Speech, we have attempted to break away from the traditional role of armchair critic and offer our people an alternative vision for the direction of our country. Some may ask why we did not implement these ideas and bring forward these proposals while we were in government? To them I say, with new leadership comes a new direction, a new purpose, and a new way of doing things.

His Imperial Majesty once said, ***"A house built on granite and strong foundations, not even the onslaught of pouring rain, gushing torrents and strong winds will be able to pull down."***

There are those who have hailed the political defeat of the PLP, saying that like the UBP, we will soon be consigned to the dust bin of history. Where we differ from that late, unlamented champion of oligarchic rule, is that we are not bound together by greed, lust for power, and opposition to progress. Where their foundation was one of sand, a foundation built on protecting the privileged and the few, we stand on a foundation built on expanding opportunity for all.

We stand on a foundation bound together by the spirits of 7 men sitting in garage 50 years ago, seeking a way for all Bermudians to have a voice, a chance, and a role in the country of our birth.

We are bound together by the memory of Walter Robinson, the man who helped shape our island's constitution.

We are bound together and inspired by the example of Dame Lois Browne Evans; first in law, first in leadership, and first in championing the rights of the people.

We are bound together and inspired by the legacy of L. Frederick Wade, our political Moses, who led us through the political wilderness but was unable to complete the journey to government with us.

We are bound together and inspired by the vision of Dame Jennifer Smith, who brought One Man, One Vote of Equal Value to our people.

We are bound together by the idea of William Alexander Scott, that Bermuda should be a place where the haves continue to have and the have nots, have more.

We are bound together by the work of Dr Ewart F. Brown who brought free and fair municipal elections to Bermuda.

We are bound together by the legacy of Paula Cox who called upon each of us to Stand Strong for Bermudians

Now, the generation that our parents sacrificed to feed, clothe and educate must step up and contribute in the shaping of our island's destiny. Instructed and mentored by our elders, respectful and knowledgeable of our history, our heritage, and of those who came before us, we owe our country so very much. Let us give those who came before us the confidence that our island's fate is in good hands. Let us give those who come behind us hope that tomorrow will be filled with greater opportunity, success and prosperity than we have today.

Thank you Mr. Speaker